

DISQUISITIONS
ON
SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

THE THIRD EDITION.



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D I S Q U I-

DISQUISITIONS, &c.

DISQUISITION I.

ON THE CHAIN OF UNIVERSAL BEING.

THE farther we inquire into the works of our great Creator, the more evident marks we shall discover of his infinite wisdom and power, and perhaps in none more remarkable, than in that wonderful chain of Beings,
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with which this terrestial globe is furnished; rising above each other, from the senseless clod, to the brightest genius of human kind, in which, tho' the chain itself is sufficiently visible, the links, which compose it, are so minute, and so finely wrought, that they are quite imperceptible to our eyes. The various qualities, with which these various Beings are endued, we perceive without difficulty, but the boundaries of those qualities, which form this chain of subordination, are so mixed, that where one ends, and the next begins, we are unable to discover. The manner by which this is performed, is a subject well worthy of our consideration, tho'

I do not remember to have seen it much considered; but on an accurate examination appears to be this.

In order to diffuse all possible happiness, God has been pleased to fill this earth with innumerable orders of Beings, superior to each other in proportion to the qualities, and faculties which he has thought proper to bestow upon them: to mere matter he has given extension, solidity, and gravity; to plants, vegetation; to animals, life and instinct; and to man, reason; each of which superior qualities augments the excellence, and dignity of the possessor, and places him higher in the scale of universal existence. In all these, it is remarkable, that

he has not formed this necessary, and beautiful subordination, by placing Beings of quite different natures above each other, but by granting some additional quality to each superior order, in conjunction with all those possessed by their inferiors; so that, tho' they rise above each other in excellence, by means of these additional qualities, one mode of existence is common to them all, without which they never could have coalesced in one uniform and regular system.

Thus, for instance, in plants we find all the qualities of mere matter, the only order below them, solidity, extension, and gravity, with the addition of vegetation; in animals, all the properties of matter, together

together with the vegetation of plants, to which is added, life, and instinct; and in man we find all the properties of matter, the vegetation of plants, the life and instinct of animals, to all which is super-added reason.

That man is endued with these properties of all inferior orders, will plainly appear by a slight examination of his composition; his body is material, and has all the properties of mere matter, solidity, extension, and gravity; it is also vested with the quality of plants, that is, a power of vegetation, which it incessantly exercises without any knowledge, or consent of his: it is sown, grows up, expands, comes to maturity, withers and dies, like

all other vegetables: he possesses likewise the qualities of lower animals, and shares their fate; like them, he is called into life without his knowledge or consent; like them he is compelled by irresistible instincts, to answer the purposes for which he was designed; like them, he performs his destined course, partakes of it's blessings, and endures it's sufferings for a short time, then dies, and is seen no more: in him instinct is not less powerful, than in them, tho' less visible, by being confounded with reason, which it sometimes concurs with, and sometimes counteracts; by this, with the concurrence of reason, he is taught the belief of a God, of a future state, and the difference

difference between moral good, and evil; to pursue happiness, to avoid danger, and to take care of himself, and his offspring; by this too he is frequently impelled, in contradiction to reason, to relinquish ease, and safety, to traverse inhospitable deserts and tempestuous seas, to inflict, and suffer all the miseries of war, and, like the Herring, and the Mackarel, to hasten to his own destruction, for the public benefit, which he neither understands, or cares for. Thus is this wonderful chain extended from the lowest to the highest order of terrestrial Beings, by links so nicely fitted that the beginning and end of each is invisible to the most inquisitive eye, and yet

they altogether compose one vast and beautiful system of subordination.

The manner by which the consummate wisdom of the divine Artificer has formed this gradation, so extensive in the whole, and so imperceptible in the parts, is this: —He constantly unites the highest degree of the qualities of each inferior order to the lowest degree of the same qualities, belonging to the order next above it; by which means, like the colours of a skilful painter, they are so blended together, and shaded off into each other, that no line of distinction is any where to be seen. Thus, for instance, solidity, extension, and gravity, the qualities of

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mere matter, being united with the lowest degree of vegetation, compose a stone ; from whence this vegetative power ascending through an infinite variety of herbs, flowers, plants, and trees to its greatest perfection in the sensitive plant, joins there the lowest degree of animal life in the shell-fish, which adheres to the rock ; and it is difficult to distinguish which possesses the greatest share, as the one shews it only by shrinking from the finger, and the other by opening to receive the water, which surrounds it. In the same manner this animal life rises from this low beginning in the shell-fish, thro' innumerable species of insects, fishes, birds, and beasts, to the confines of reason, where, in

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the dog, the monkey, and chimpanzè, it unites so closely with the lowest degree of that quality in man, that they cannot easily be distinguished from each other. From this lowest degree in the brutal Hottentot, reason, with the assistance of learning and science, advances, thro' the various stages of human understanding, which rise above each other, 'till in a Bacon, or a Newton it attains the summit.

Here we must stop, being unable to pursue the progress of this astonishing chain beyond the limits of this terrestrial globe with the naked eye; but thro' the perspective of analogy, and conjecture we may perceive that it ascends a great deal higher, to the inhabitants of

of other planets, to angels, and archangels, the lowest orders of whom may be united by a like easy transition with the highest of our own, in whom to reason may be added intuitive knowledge, insight into futurity, with innumerable other faculties of which we are unable to form the least idea; through whom it may ascend, by gradations almost infinite, to those most exalted of created Beings, who are seated on the footstool of the celestial throne.

DISQUISITION II.

ON CRUELTY TO INFERIOR ANIMALS.

MAN is that link of the chain of universal existence, by which spiritual and corporeal Beings are united: as the numbers and variety of the latter his inferiors are almost infinite, so probably are those of the former his superiors; and as we see that the lives and happiness of those below us are dependent on our wills, we may reasonably conclude, that our lives, and happiness are equally dependent on the wills of those

those above us ; accountable, like ourselves, for the use of this power, to the Supreme Creator, and Governor of all things. Should this analogy be well founded, how criminal will our account appear, when laid before that just and impartial Judge ! How will man, that sanguinary tyrant, be able to excuse himself from the charge of those innumerable cruelties inflicted on his unoffending subjects committed to his care, formed for his benefit, and placed under his authority by their common Father ? whose mercy is over all his works, and who expects that this authority should be exercised not only with tenderness and mercy, but in conformity to the laws of justice and gratitude.

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But to what horrid deviations from these benevolent intentions are we daily witnesses ! No small part of mankind derive their chief amusements from the deaths and sufferings of inferior animals ; a much greater, consider them only as engines of wood, or iron, useful in their several occupations. The carman drives his horse, and the carpenter his nail, by repeated blows ; and so long as these produce the desired effect, and they both go, they neither reflect or care whether either of them have any sense of feeling. The butcher knocks down the stately ox with no more compassion than the blacksmith hammers a horse-shoe ; and plunges his knife into the throat of the innocent lamb,

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with as little reluctance as the tailor sticks his needle into the collar of a coat.

If there are some few, who, formed in a softer mould, view with pity the sufferings of these defenceless creatures, there is scarce one who entertains the least idea, that justice or gratitude can be due to their merits, or their services. The social and friendly dog is hanged without remorse, if, by barking in defence of his master's person, and property, he happens unknowingly to disturb his rest: the generous horse, who has carried his ungrateful master for many years with ease, and safety, worn out with age and infirmities contracted in his service, is by him condemned to end his miserable

miserable days in a dust-cart, where the more he exerts his little remains of spirit, the more he is whipped, to save his stupid driver the trouble of whipping some other, less obedient to the lash. Sometimes, having been taught the practice of many unnatural and useless feats in a riding-house, he is at last turned out, and consigned to the dominion of a hackney-coachman, by whom he is every day corrected for performing those tricks, which he has learned under so long and severe a discipline. The sluggish bear, in contradiction to his nature, is taught to dance, for the diversion of a malignant mob, by placing red-hot irons under his feet: and the majestic bull is tortured by every mode,

mode which 'malice can invent, for no offence, but that he is gentle, and unwilling to affail his diabolical tormentors. These, with innumerable other acts of cruelty, injustice, and ingratitude, are every day committed, not only with impunity, but without censure, and even without observation ; but we may be assured, that they cannot finally pass away unnoticed, and unretaliated.

The laws of self-defence undoubtedly justify us in destroying those animals who would destroy us, who injure our properties, or annoy our persons ; but not even these, whenever their situation incapacitates them from hurting us. I know of no right which we have to

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shoot a bear on an inaccessible island of ice, or an eagle on the mountain's top; whose lives cannot injure us, nor deaths procure us any benefit. We are unable to give life, and therefore ought not wantonly to take it away from the meanest insect without sufficient reason; they all receive it from the same benevolent hand as ourselves, and have therefore an equal right to enjoy it.

God has been pleased to create numberless animals intended for our sustenance; and that they are so intended, the agreeable flavour of their flesh to our palates, and the wholesome nutriment which it administers to our stomachs, are sufficient proofs: these, as they are

formed for our use, propagated by our culture, and fed by our care, we have certainly a right to deprive of life, because it is given and preserved to them on that condition; but this should always be performed with all the tenderness and compassion which so disagreeable an office will permit; and no circumstances ought to be omitted, which can render their executions as quick and easy as possible. For this, Providence has wisely and benevolently provided, by forming them in such a manner, that their flesh becomes rancid and unpalatable by a painful and lingering death; and has thus compelled us to be merciful without compassion, and cautious of their suffering, for

the sake of ourselves: but, if there are any whose tastes are so vitiated, and whose hearts are so hardened, as to delight in such inhuman sacrifices, and to partake of them without remorse, they should be looked upon as dæmons in human shapes, and expect a retaliation of those tortures which they have inflicted on the innocent, for the gratification of their own depraved and unnatural appetites.

So violent are the passions of anger and revenge in the human breast, that it is not wonderful that men should persecute their real or imaginary enemies with cruelty and malevolence; but that there should exist in nature a Being who can receive pleasure from giving pain, would

would be totally incredible, if we were not convinced, by melancholy experience, that there are not only many, but that this unaccountable disposition is in some manner inherent in the nature of man; for, as he cannot be taught by example, nor led to it by temptation, or prompted to it by interest, it must be derived from his native constitution; and is a remarkable confirmation of what revelation so frequently inculcates—that he brings into the world with him an original depravity, the effects of a fallen and degenerate state; in proof of which we need only observe, that the nearer he approaches to a state of nature, the more predominant this disposition appears, and the

more violently it operates. We see children laughing at the miseries which they inflict on every unfortunate animal which comes within their power: all savages are ingenious in contriving, and happy in executing, the most exquisite tortures; and the common people of all countries are delighted with nothing so much as bull-baitings, prize-fightings, executions, and all spectacles of cruelty and horror. Though civilization may in some degree abate this native ferocity, it can never quite extirpate it; the most polished are not ashamed to be pleased with scenes of little less barbarity, and, to the disgrace of human nature, to dignify them with the name of sports. They

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arm cocks with artificial weapons, which nature had kindly denied to their malevolence, and with shouts of applause and triumph, see them plunge them into each other's hearts: they view with delight the trembling deer and defenceless hare, flying for hours in the utmost agonies of terror and despair, and at last, sinking under fatigue, devoured by their merciless pursuers: they see with joy the beautiful pheasant and harmless partridge drop from their flight, weltering in their blood, or perhaps perishing with wounds and hunger, under the cover of some friendly thicket to which they have in vain retreated for safety: they triumph over the unsuspecting fish, whom

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they have decoyed by an insidious pretence of feeding, and drag him from his native element by a hook fixed to and tearing out his entrails: and, to add to all this, they spare neither labour nor expence to preserve and propagate these innocent animals, for no other end, but to multiply the objects of their persecution.

What name should we bestow on a superior Being, whose whole endeavours were employed, and whose whole pleasure consisted in terrifying, ensnaring, tormenting, and destroying mankind? whose superior faculties were exerted in fomenting animosities amongst them, in contriving engines of destruction, and inciting them to use them in maiming

ing and murdering each other? whose power over them was employed in assisting the rapacious, deceiving the simple, and oppressing the innocent? who, without provocation or advantage, should continue from day to day, void of all pity and remorse, thus to torment mankind for diversion, and at the same time endeavour with his utmost care to preserve their lives, and to propagate their species, in order to increase the number of victims devoted to his malevolence, and be delighted in proportion to the miseries which he occasioned? I say, what name detestable enough could we find for such a Being? Yet, if we impartially consider the case, and our intermediate

termediate situation, we must acknowledge, that, with regard to inferior animals, just such a Being is a sportsman.

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DISQUISITION III.

ON A PRÆ-EXISTENT STATE.

THAT mankind had existed in some state previous to the present, was the opinion of the wisest sages of the most remote antiquity. It was held by the Gymnosophists of Egypt, the Brachmans of India, the Magi of Persia, and the greatest philosophers of Greece and Rome ; it was likewise adopted by the fathers of the Christian church, and frequently enforced by her primitive writers ; why it has been so little noticed, so much overlooked, rather than rejected,

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by the divines and metaphysicians of latter ages, I am at a loss to account for, as it is undoubtedly confirmed by reason, by all the appearances of nature, and the doctrines of revelation.

In the first place then it is confirmed by reason ; which teaches us, that it is impossible that the conjunction of a male and female can create, or bring into Being an immortal soul : they may prepare a material habitation for it ; but there must be an immaterial præ-existent inhabitant ready to take possession. Reason assures us, that an immortal soul, which will exist eternally after the dissolution of the body, must have eternally existed before the formation of it ; for whatever

whatever has no end, can never have had any beginning, but must exist in some manner which bears no relation to time, to us totally incomprehensible: if therefore the soul will continue to exist in a future life, it must have existed in a former. Reason likewise tells us, that an omnipotent and benevolent Creator would never have formed such a world as this, and filled it with such inhabitants, if the present was the only, or even the first state of their existence, a state which, if unconnected with the past and the future, seems calculated for no one purpose intelligible to our understandings; neither of good or evil, of happiness or misery, of virtue or vice,

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of reward or punishment, but a confused jumble of them all together, proceeding from no visible cause, and tending to no end. But, as we are certain that infinite power cannot be employed without effect, nor infinite wisdom without design, we may rationally conclude, that this world could be designed for nothing more than a prison, in which we are awhile confined to receive punishment for the offences committed in a former, and an opportunity of preparing ourselves for the enjoyment of happiness in a future life.

Secondly. These conclusions of reason are sufficiently confirmed by the face of nature, and the appearances of things; this world is evidently

dently formed for a place of punishment, as well as probation; a prison, or house of correction, to which we are committed, some for a longer, and some for a shorter period; some to the severest labour, others to more indulgent tasks; and if we consider it under this character, we shall perceive it admirably fitted for the end for which it was intended. It is a spacious, beautiful, and durable structure: it contains many various apartments, a few very comfortable, many tolerable, and some extremely wretched: it is inclosed with a fence so impassable, that none can surmount it but with the loss of life. Its inhabitants likewise exactly resemble those of other prisons: they come in with malignant dispositions,

dispositions, and unruly passions, from whence, like other confined criminals, they receive great part of punishment by abusing and injuring each other. As we may suppose, that they have not all been equally guilty, so they are not all equally miserable ; the majority are permitted to procure a tolerable subsistence by their labour, and pass thro' their confinement without any extraordinary penalties, except from paying their fees, at their discharge by death. Others, who perhaps stand in need of more severe chastisement, receive it by a variety of methods ; some by the most acute, and some by the most tedious pains and diseases ; some by disappointments, and many by success, in their favourite pursuits ;

fuits ; some by being condemned to situations peculiarly unfortunate, as to those of extreme poverty, or superabundant riches, of despicable meanness, or painful pre-eminence, of galley-slaves in a despotic, or ministers in a free country. If we survey the various regions of the globe, what dreadful scenes of wretchedness every where present themselves to our eyes ! in some, we see thousands chained to the oar, and perpetually suffering from the inclemency of all weathers, and their more inclement masters : in some, not fewer condemned to wear out their miserable lives in dreary mines, deprived of air and daylight ; and in others, much greater numbers torn from their native country, their families, and friends,

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and sold to the most inhuman of all tyrants, under whose lash they are worn out with fatigue, or expire in torments. The history of mankind is indeed little more than a detail of their miseries, some inflicted by the hand of Providence, and many more by their own wickedness, and mutual ill-usage. As nations, we see them sometimes chastised by plagues, famines, inundations, and earthquakes ; and continually destroying each other with fire and sword ; we see fleets and armies combating with savage fury, and employing against each other every instrument of torture and death, which malevolence can invent, or ferocity make use of : we see the dying and the dead huddled together in heaps, and weltering in each other's

other's blood ; and can we be spectators of this horrid tragedy, without considering the performers as condemned criminals, compelled, like the Gladiators of the ancients, to receive their punishment from each other's hands ? The Orator, the Poet, and the Historian may celebrate them, as heroes fighting for the rights and liberties of their respective countries ; but the Christian Philosopher can look upon them in no other light, than as condemned spirits exiled into human flesh, and sent into this world to chastise each other for past offences. As individuals, we see men afflicted with innumerable diseases, which proceed not from accident, but are congenial with their original

formations, and evidently the dispositions of Providence, designed for the most important ends ; the stone grows in the human bladder, under the same direction as in the quarry, and the seeds of scurvy, rheumatism, and gout are sown in the blood by the same omnipotent hand, which has scattered those of vegetables over the face of the earth. From these various instruments of torture, numberless are the miseries which mankind endure ; nor are those perhaps less numerous, though less visible, which they suffer from that treachery, injustice, ingratitude, ill-humour, and perverseness, with which they every hour torment one another, interrupt the peace of society, and imbitter

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the comforts of domestic life; to all which we may add, that wonderful ingenuity, which they possess, of creating imaginary, in the absence of real misfortunes, and that corrosive quality in the human mind, which, for want of the proper food of business or contemplation, preys upon itself, and makes solitude intolerable, and thinking a most painful task. Who, that surveys this melancholy picture of the present life, can entertain a doubt, but that it is intended for a state of punishment, and therefore must be subsequent to some former, in which this punishment was deserved?

Lastly. The opinion of præ-existence is no less confirmed by revelation, than by reason, and the

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appearances of things; for, altho' perhaps it is no where in the New Testament explicitly enforced, yet throughout the whole tenour of those writings it is every where implied: in them mankind are constantly represented as coming into the world under a load of guilt; as condemned criminals, the children of wrath, and objects of divine indignation; placed in it for a time by the mercies of God, to give them an opportunity of expiating this guilt by sufferings, and regaining, by a pious and virtuous conduct, their lost state of happiness and innocence: this is styled working out their salvation, not preventing their condemnation, for that is already past, and their only hope

hope now is redemption, that is, being rescued from a state of captivity and sin, in which they are universally involved. This is the very essence of the Christian dispensation, and the grand principle in which it differs from the religion of nature; in every other respect they are nearly similar: they both enjoin the same moral duties, and prohibit the same vices; both inculcate the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments: but here they essentially disagree; natural religion informs us, that a just and benevolent Creator could have no other design in placing us in this world, but to make us happy, and that, if we commit no extraordinary crimes, we may hope

to be so in another; but Christianity teaches a severer, and more alarming lesson, and acquaints us, that we are admitted into this life oppressed with guilt and depravity, which we must atone for by suffering its usual calamities, and work off by acts of positive virtue, before we can hope for happiness in another. Now, if by all this a *præ-existent* state is not constantly supposed, that is, that mankind have existed in some state previous to the present, in which this guilt was incurred, and this depravity contracted, there can be no meaning at all, or such a meaning as contradicts every principle of common sense—that guilt can be contracted without acting, or that we can act without

without existing: so undeniable is this inference, that it renders any positive assertion of a *præ-existent* state totally useless; as, if a man at the moment of his entrance into a new country was declared a criminal, it would surely be unnecessary to assert that he had lived in some other before he came there.

In all our researches into abstruse subjects, there is a certain clue, without which, the further we proceed the more we are bewildered, but which being fortunately discovered, leads us at once through the whole labyrinth, puts an end to our difficulties, and opens a system perfectly clear, consistent, and intelligible. The doctrine of *præ-existence*, or the acknowledgment

ment of some past state of guilt and disobedience, I take to be this very clue; which if we constantly carry along with us, we shall proceed unembarrassed through all the intricate mysteries both of nature and revelation, and at last arrive at so clear a prospect of the wise and just dispensations of our Creator, as cannot fail to afford compleat satisfaction to the most inquisitive sceptic.

For instance; Are we unable to answer that important question, Whence came evil? that is, why a Creator of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, should have formed a world replete with so many imperfections, and those so productive of calamities to its inhabitants?

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this clue will direct us to this satisfactory reply, as far as the question relates to the evils of the present life—Because he designed it for a place of punishment and probation; for which it is perfectly adapted; and we can be no more surprised to see such a world as this make a part of the universal system, than to see a magnificent prison, with all its appendages of punishment, whips, pillories, and gibbets, make a part of a large, populous, and well-governed city. Are we under difficulties to comprehend why the same omnipotent and benevolent Creator should fill this world with inhabitants so wicked, and so miserable? this clue will immediately lead us to a solution of them,

them, and point out the true reason—Because they are sent hither to be punished, and reformed. Do we reject all those passages in the New Testament, as derogatory to the divine wisdom and goodness, which declare, that mankind come into this world under a load of guilt and depravity, and under the displeasure of their Creator? — no sooner are we brought by this clue within sight of a *præ-existent* state, in which this guilt and depravity may have been contracted, but our incredulity vanishes, and we perceive plainly, that their admission into this world, under those circumstances, is not only consistent with the justice of God, but the strongest instance of his mercy and benevolence;

benevolence; as by it they are enabled to purge off this depravity, to expiate their offences, and to reinstate themselves in his favour.

Thus is a præ-existent state, I think, clearly demonstrated, by the principles of reason, the appearances of things, and the sense of revelation; all which agree, that this world is intended for a place of punishment, as well as probation, and must therefore refer to some former period; for, as probation implies a future life, for which it is preparatory, so punishment must imply a former state, in which offences were committed, for which it is due; and indeed there is not a single argument drawn from the justice of God, and the seemingly

seemingly undeserved sufferings of many in the present state, which can be urged in proof of a future life, which proves not with superior force the existence of another, which is already past.

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DISQUISITION IV.

ON THE NATURE OF TIME.

WE are so accustomed to connect our ideas of time with the history of what passes in it, that is, to mistake a succession of thoughts and actions for time, that we find it extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, totally to separate or distinguish them from each other: and indeed, had we power to effect this in our minds, all human language is so formed, that it would fail us in our expression: yet certain

tain it is, that time, abstracted from the thoughts, actions, and motions which pass in it, is actually nothing: it is only the mode in which some created Beings are ordained to exist, but in itself has really no existence at all.

Though this opinion may seem chimerical to many, who have not much considered the subject, yet it is by no means new, for it was long since adopted by some of the most celebrated philosophers of antiquity, particularly by the Epicureans; and is thus well expressed by Lucretius:

*Tempus item per se non est; sed rebus ab ipsis
Consequitur sensus, transactum quod sit in ævo,
Tum quæ res instat, quid porro deinde sequatur;
Nec per se, quemquam tempus sentire, fatendum est,
Semotum ab usum, motu, placidaque quiete.*

Time

Time of itself is nothing ; but from thought
 Receives its rise, by lab'ring fancy wrought,
 From things considered : while we think on some
 As present, some as past, and some to come :
 No thought can think on Time, that's still con-
 fess'd,
 But thinks on things in motion, or at rest.

CREECH.

From observing the diurnal re-
 volutions of the sun, and the vari-
 ous transactions which pass during
 those revolutions, we acquire con-
 ceptions of days ; by dividing these
 days we form hours, minutes, and
 seconds ; and by multiplying them,
 months, years, and ages ; then by
 measuring these imaginary periods
 against each other, and bestowing
 on each distinct denominations, we
 give them the appearance of some-
 thing real : yesterday, which is past,

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and to-morrow, which is not yet come, assume the same reality as the present day ; and thus we imagine time to resemble a great book, one of whose pages is every day wrote on, and the rest remain blank, to be filled up in their turns with the events of futurity ; whilst in fact this is all but the delusion of our own imaginations, and time is nothing more, than the manner in which past, present, and future events succeed each other : yet is this delusion so correspondent with our present state, and so woven up with all human language, that without much reflection it cannot be perceived, nor when perceived can it be remedied : nor can I, while endeavouring to prove time to be nothing,

nothing, avoid treating it as something in almost every line.

There seems to be in the nature of things, two modes of existence; one, in which all events, past, present, and to come, appear in one view; which, if the expression may be allowed, I shall call perpetually instantaneous; and which, as I apprehend, constitutes Eternity; the other, in which all things are presented separately, and successively, which produces what we call Time.

Of the first of these human reason can afford us no manner of conception; yet it assures us, on the strongest evidence, that such must be the existence of the supreme Creator of all things, that such probably may be the existence

of many superior orders of created Beings, and that such possibly may be our own in another state: to Beings so constituted, all events past, present, and future are presented in one congregated mass, which to us are spread out in succession to adapt them to our temporary mode of perception: in these ideas have no succession, and therefore to their thoughts, actions, or existence, time, which is succession only, can bear not the least relation whatsoever. To existence of this kind alone can eternity belong; for eternity can never be composed of finite parts, which, however multiplied, can never become infinite; but must be something simple, uniform, invariable, and indivisible; permanent,

permanent, tho' instantaneous, and endless without progression. There are some remarkable expressions both in the Old and New Testament, alluding to this mode of existence; in the former, God is denominated *I am**; and in the latter, Christ says, *before Abraham was, I am*†: both evidently implying duration without succession: from whence the schoolmen probably derive their obscure notions of such a kind of duration, which they explain by the more obscure term of a *punctum stans*.

With the other mode of existence we are sufficiently acquainted, being that in which Providence has placed us, and all things around

* Exod. iv. 14.

† John viii. 58.

us, during our residence on this terrestrial globe; in which all ideas follow each other in our minds in a regular and uniform succession, not unlike the tickings of a clock; and by that means all objects are presented to our imaginations in the same progressive manner: and if any vary much from that destined pace, by too rapid, or too slow a motion, they immediately become to us, totally imperceptible. We now perceive every one, as it passes, thro' a small aperture separately, as in the Camera Obscura, and this we call time; but at the conclusion of this state we may probably exist in a manner quite different; the window may be thrown open, the whole prospect appear

appear at one view, and all this apparatus, which we call time, be totally done away: for time is certainly nothing more than the shifting of scenes necessary for the performance of this tragi-comical farce, which we are here exhibiting, and must undoubtedly end with the conclusion of the drama. It has no more a real essence, independent of thought and action, than sight, hearing, and smell have independent of their proper organs, and the animals to whom they belong; and when they cease to exist, time can be no more. There are also several passages in the scriptures, declaring this annihilation of time at the consummation of all things: *And the Angel, which I saw stand upon the sea and*

the earth lifted up his hand towards heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, &c. that there should be time no longer.*

To this opinion of the non-entity of time it has by some been objected, that time has many attributes and powers inherent in its nature ; and that whatever has attributes and powers must itself exist : it is infinite, say they, and eternal ; it contains all things ; and forces itself on our imaginations in the absence of all other existence : but to this it may be answered, that the human mind is able in the very same manner to realize nothing ; and then all the same attributes and powers are applicable

* Rev. x. 5.

with

with equal propriety to that nothing,
thus supposed to be something :

* Nothing, thou elder brother ev'n to shade !
Thou hadst a Being, ere the world was made,
And, well fix'd, art alone of ending not afraid.

Nothing is infinite, and eternal ; that is, hath neither beginning, nor end : it contains all things ; that is, it begins where all existence ends ; and therefore surrounds, and contains all things : it forces itself on the mind, in the absence of all existence ; that is, where we suppose there is no existence, we must suppose there is nothing : this exact resemblance of their attributes and powers, more plainly demonstrates, that time is nothing.

From this non-existence of time thus established, many conclusions

* Lord Rochester.

will

will arise, both useful and entertaining ; from whence perhaps new lights may be thrown on several speculations religious and metaphysical, whose outlines I shall just venture to trace, and leave them to be filled up by abler pens.

1st. If time be no more than the succession of ideas, and actions, however these may be accelerated, or retarded, time will be just the same : that is, neither longer or shorter, provided the same ideas, and actions, succeed one another, as far, I mean, as it relates to Beings so thinking and acting. For instance, were the earth, and all the celestial bodies, to perform the same revolutions in one day, which they now perform in a whole year, and were all the ideas, actions, and lives

lives of mankind hastened on in the same proportion, the period of our lives would not be in the least shortened ; but that day would be exactly equal to the present year : if in the space of seventy or eighty of these days a man was born, educated, and grown up, had exercised a profession, had seen his children come to maturity, his grand-children succeed them, and, during this period, had had all his ideas and actions, all his enjoyments and sufferings, accelerated in the same proportion, he would not only seem to himself, and to all who lived in the same state with him, and measured time by the same standard, to have lived as long, but actually and in fact would have lived as long

long as one, who resides on this globe as great a number of our present years.

2dly. This being the case, it follows, that the life of every man must be longer, or shorter, in proportion to the number of his thoughts, and actions: for was it possible for a man to think and act as much in an hour, as in a year, that hour, as far as it related to him, would not only seem, but actually become a year. On the other hand, was it possible for a man totally to abstain from thinking and acting for an hour, or a year, time, with regard to him, for that period, would, have no existence; or, could he keep one idea fixed in his mind, and continue one single act during the

the same space, time, which is a succession only of ideas and actions, must be equally annihilated: whether these ideas and actions are exercised on great or little occasions, whether they are productive of pleasing or painful sensations, with regard to this purpose their effects will be the same: neither their importance or consequences will add any thing to time, but their numbers and celerity most undoubtedly will. Our lives therefore, when diversified with a variety of objects, and busied in a multiplicity of pursuits, though perhaps less happy, will certainly be longer, than when dosed away in sloth, inactivity, and apathy.

3dly. From hence it is evident,
that

that we can form no judgment of the duration of the lives, enjoyments, and sufferings of other animals, with the progression of whose ideas we are totally unacquainted, and who may be framed in that respect, as well as in many others, so widely different from ourselves. The gaudy butterfly, that flutters in the sunshine but for a few months, may live as long as the stupid tortoise, that breathes for a century; the insect, that survives not one diurnal revolution of the sun, may, for any thing we know, enjoy an age of happiness; and the miserable horse, that appears to us to suffer the drudgery of ten or twenty years, may finish his laborious task in as many months, days, or hours.

4thly.

4thly. For the like reasons we can judge but very imperfectly of what are real evils in the universal system, whilst we remain in this temporal state of existence, in which all things are exhibited to us by scraps, one after the other: for these detached portions, which viewed separately, seem but misshapen blotches, may, to Beings, who in an eternal state see past, present, and future, all delineated on one canvas, appear as well-disposed shades necessary to render perfect the whole most beautiful landscape. Nay, even pain, that taken singly is so pungent and disagreeable a potion, when thrown into the cup of universal happiness;

may

may perhaps add to it a flavour, which without this infusion it could not have acquired.

5thly. If time has itself no existence, it can never put an end to the existence of any thing else ; and this seems no inconclusive argument for the immortality of the soul : for if any thing is, and no cause appears to us why it should cease to be, we can have no good reason to believe, that it will not continue. Whatever has no connection with time must be eternal ; now the only property of the soul, with which we are acquainted, is thought, which bears no relation to time ; whence it is reasonable to suppose, that the soul itself is equally unconnected with it, and

consequently eternal. Even in material Beings we see continual mutations, but can perceive no symptoms of annihilation; and therefore we have surely less cause to suspect it in immaterial: from whence I am inclined to think, that the essences of all things are eternal, that is, unrelative to time, and that it is only our manner of perceiving them, that causes them to appear temporal to us; past, present, and future being not inherent in their natures, but only in our progressive mode of perception.

6thly. From what has been said, we may perceive into what amazing absurdities many of our ablest divines, and metaphysicians have plunged, in their investigations of eternity; for making which their receipt is usually

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this : they take of time a sufficient quantity, and, chopping it in small pieces, they dispose them in imaginary lengths, which they distinguish by the names of minutes, hours, days, years, and ages : then feeling in their own minds a power of multiplying these as often as they think fit, they heap millions upon millions ; and finding this power to be a machine, that may be worked backwards and forwards with equal facility, they extend their line both ways, and so their eternity is compleated, and fit for use : they then divide it in the middle, and out of a single eternity they make two, as they term them, *a parte ante*, and *a parte post* ; each of which having one end, may be drawn out, like a juggler's ribband, as long as

they please. The contradictions so manifest in this system, sufficiently declare its falsehood: for in adopting it we must acknowledge, that each half of this eternity is equal to the whole; that in each the number of days cannot exceed that of the months, nor the months be more numerous than the years, they being all alike infinite; that whether it commenced yesterday, or ten thousand years since, the length of its duration must be the same; for the length depends not on the beginning, but on the end, but that cannot be different, where there is no end at all: the absurdity of all these propositions is too glaring, to stand in need of any refutation; for it is evident, that whatever contains

parts, length, or numbers, can never be infinite ; whatever had a beginning must have an end, because beginning and ending are the modes of temporary existence : what has no end could have no beginning, because both are equally inconsistent with eternity. In truth, all these absurdities arise from applying to eternity our ideas of time, which, being two modes of existence intirely different, bear not the least relation to each other : time is in its nature finite, and successive ; eternity infinite, and instantaneous ; and therefore their properties are no more applicable to each other, than those of sounds to colours, or of colours to sounds ; and we can no more form eternity out of time,

than, by mixing red, blue, and green, we can compose an anthem or an opera.

7thly. From hence appears the necessity, in our considerations on these subjects, of keeping our ideas of these two modes of existence entirely and constantly distinct, as they themselves are in nature: by which means we shall presently sweep away many of those theological and metaphysical cobwebs, which now encumber and disgrace our most learned libraries; and cut short many impertinent enquiries concerning the creation of the universe, God's foreknowledge and predestination, the præ-existent and future state of souls, the injustice of eternal punishments, and

the sleep of the soul, with numberless others of the same kind, all derived from injudiciously blending and confounding these two kinds of existence together, and applying notions and expressions to one, which can only with propriety belong to the other.

To enter largely into these abstruse and intricate subjects, would require a folio; I shall therefore only say one word or two to each.

It has been frequently asked, why God created the universe at the time in which he did create it, and why he suffered millions of ages to pass away before the commencement of so glorious a work? to this it may be replied with equal conciseness and truth, that in fact no such

such ages ever did or could pass before it was created ; nor was it created in any time at all ; for neither the essence or actions of God have the most distant relation to time ; he has been pleased in his infinite wisdom to bestow on some parts of his creation a temporal mode of existence, and from this alone time derives its origin : to suppose time antecedent to temporal existence, is to suppose effects to precede their causes ; and not less absurd, than to imagine, that there could be perception before sensible Beings, or thought before intelligent Beings existed. This very question proves the absurdity of connecting time and eternity together ; for if God's power of creating

is coæval with his existence, that existence eternal, and that eternity only time extended; this evident contradiction follows, that God, tho' always equally able, yet in fact never could create any thing so soon, but that he might have created it sooner: that is in other words, that he never could create any thing as soon as he could. All this puzzle arises from our foolishly supposing, that eternal and temporal Beings must act in a manner similar to each other: if we do any thing, it must be done at some time or other; but God acts in ways as different from ours, as inconceivable to us; his ways are not like our ways, nor his thoughts like our thoughts: one day is to him as a thousand

thousand years, and a thousand years as one day ; that is, neither of them, with his manner of existing, thinking, or acting, have any connection whatever.

All disputes about God's fore-knowledge and predestination, are of the same species, and derive their birth intirely from the same absurd supposition. Fore-knowledge and predestination imply succession, and are relative to time, which has no relation to the essence or perception of the Creator of all things ; and therefore, in the sense usually applied to them, cannot with any propriety be attributed to him. He knows all things, and ordains all things ; but as all things are equally present to the divine intuition, it is impossible

impossible that he can foreknow or predestinate any thing.

Of the same kind are all questions concerning the præ-existent, and future state of the soul, arising likewise from confounding our ideas of these two modes of existence, temporal and eternal: whenever the soul is united with the body, perceiving all things by succession through material organs, it acquires ideas of time, and can form none of existence unconnected with it; but whenever this union is dissolved, it probably returns again to its native mode of eternal existence, in which the whole circle of its perception being at once visible, it has nothing further to do with time; it is neither old or young, it lives

no more in the seventeenth than in the seventh century, no nearer to the end than the beginning of the world: all ideas of years and ages, of præ-existence and futurity, of beginning and ending, will be totally obliterated: and possibly it will be as incapable of forming any conceptions of time, as it is now of eternity. The soul therefore being quite unconnected with time, whenever it is unconnected with a body, cannot properly be said to exist in another time, either prior or posterior, but only in another manner.

Every argument also endeavouring to prove the injustice and disproportion of eternal punishments for temporal offences, is founded on the same erroneous principles, and admits

admits of the same answer ; that all computations of the magnitude of such punishments from their duration, by heaping years and ages upon each other, are absurd, and inconsistent with that state in which they are to be inflicted : crimes will there be punished according to the degrees of their malignity, but neither for a long, or a short, nor for any time at all : for all punishments must be correspondent to the state in which they are suffered : in an eternal state, they must be eternal, in a temporal they must be temporal ; for it is equally impossible, that a Being can be punished for a time, where no time is, as that it should be punished everlasting in a state which itself cannot last. As therefore,

therefore, from the nature of things, this dispensation is necessary, it cannot be unjust, and from the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Author of nature, we may reasonably presume that it cannot be disproportioned to its several objects.

The non-entity of time will serve likewise to settle a late ingenious controversy, and shew, that, like most others of the kind, it is a dispute only upon words: this controversy is concerning the sleep of the soul; that is, whether it enters into a state of happiness or misery immediately on its dissolution from the body, or remains in a state of profound insensibility, till the general judgment, and then receives its final sentence, and suffers its execution:

ecution : for if time is nothing but the thoughts and actions which pass in it, the condition of the soul, whether it sleeps or not, will be exactly the same ; nor will the final sentence be one moment deferred by such a state of insensibility, how long soever it may continue ; for tho', during that period, many revolutions of the sun, and of empires, may take place, many millions of thoughts and actions may pass, which not only measure time, but create it ; yet with regard to the soul so sleeping, none of these, that is, no time will pass at all ; and, if no time intervenes, judgment, however remote with regard to others, will as instantly follow its dissolution, as if that had happened

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the precedent moment. But if, according to the foregoing principles, the soul in a separate state bears no relation to time, then no event in which it is there concerned can be before or after another, either nearer or farther from any period, from death or judgment, from the creation or dissolution of this planetary system: this we see must at once put an end to all disputes on this subject, and render the use of soporifics intirely needless.

After all that has been here advanced, I am not insensible, that we are here so constantly conversant with temporal objects, and so totally unacquainted with eternal, that few, very few will ever be
able

able to abstract existence from time, or comprehend that any thing can exist out of, and unconnected with it: in vain should I suggest, that the various planets are peopled by the divine wisdom with a variety of Beings, and even this terrestrial globe with innumerable creatures, whose situations are so different, that their manner of existence is quite unknown and incomprehensible to each other: that millions inhabit the impenetrable recesses of the unfathomable ocean, who can no more form conceptions of any existence beyond the limits of that their native element, than we ourselves can beyond the boundaries of time; and that therefore in reality, time may be no more necessary

cessary to existence than water, tho' the mode of that existence we are unable to comprehend. But, I well know, these analogous arguments have little weight ; the prejudice of education, the strength of habit, and the force of language, all formed on the supposed union of existence with time, will persuade men to reject this hypothesis as vain and chimerical. To all busy men, and men of business, to all jogging on in the beaten roads of professions, or scrambling up the precipices of ambition, these considerations must appear unprofitable illusions, if not incomprehensible nonsense ; for to endeavour to convince a merchant subsisting on long credit, a lawyer

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inriched by delay, a divine who has purchased a next presentation, a general who is in no hurry to fight, or a minister whose object is the continuance of his power, that time is nothing, is an arduous task, and very unlikely to be attended with success. Whoever desires to taste or understand such abstracted speculations, must leave for a while the noisy bustle of worldly occupations, and retire into the sequestered shades of solitude and contemplation: from whence he will return certainly not richer, possibly not wiser, but probably more susceptible of amusement from his own company for want of better, and more able to draw entertain-

entertainment from his own imaginations: which in his journey thro' life he will often find an acquisition not altogether inconsiderable.

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DISQUISITION V.

ON THE ANALOGY BETWEEN THINGS
MATERIAL AND INTELLECTUAL.

AS all things, both material and intellectual, are derived from the same omnipotent author, we shall find, on an accurate examination, that there is a certain analogy, which runs through them all, well worthy of our attention and admiration; that is, that there are in the elements of the material world, and in the passions and actions of mankind, powers and propensities of a similar nature, which operate in

in a similar manner, throughout every part of the material, moral, and political system. But this theory, rather abstruse, is difficult to be explained, and will be best elucidated by examples, which every day fall within our observation.

In the material world, for instance, we see all disorders cured by their own excesses: a sultry calm fails not to produce a storm, which dissipates the noxious vapours, and restores a purer air; the fiercest tempest, exhausted by its own violence, at length subsides; and an intense sunshine, whilst it parches up the thirsty earth, exhales clouds, which quickly water it with refreshing showers. Just so in the moral

G 3 world,

world, all our passions and vices, by their excesses, defeat themselves ; excessive rage renders men impotent to execute the mischiefs which they threaten ; repeated treacheries make them unable to deceive, because none will trust them ; and extreme profligacy, by the diseases which it occasions, destroys their appetites, and works an unwilling reformation.

As in the natural world, the elements are restrained in their most destructive effects, by their mutual opposition ; so in the moral, are the vices of mankind prevented from being totally subversive of society, by their continually counteracting each other : profusion restores to the public the wealth which avarice

rice has detained from it for a time ; envy clips the towering wings of ambition ; and even revenge, by it's terrors, prevents many injuries and oppressions : the treachery of the thief discovers his accomplices ; the perfidy of the prostitute brings the highwayman to justice ; and the villainy of the assassin puts an end to the cruelty of a tyrant.

In the material world, the middle climates farthest removed from the extremes of heat and cold, are the most salubrious, and most pleasant : so in life, the middle ranks are ever most favourable to virtue, and to happiness ; which dwell not in the extremes of poverty or riches.

As throughout the various regions of the earth, advantages and inconveniences are distributed with a more impartial hand than we on a transitory view are apt to imagine; so are they to the various conditions of human life: if the more southern climates are gilded with a brighter sunshine, perfumed with more fragrant gales, and decorated with a greater profusion of plants and flowers, they are at the same time perpetually exposed to pestilential heats, infested with noxious animals, torn by hurricanes, and rocked by earthquakes, unknown to the rougher regions of the North. In like manner, if the rich enjoy luxuries, from which the poor are debarred, they suffer many diseases

diseases and disquietudes, from which those are fortunately exempted.

We behold with admiration the vivid azure of the vaulted sky, and variegated colours of the distant clouds ; but, if we approach them on the summit of some lofty mountain, we discover that the beauteous scene is all illusion, and find ourselves involved only in a dreary fog or a tempestuous whirlwind : just so, in youth, we look up with pleasing expectation to the pleasures and honours, which we fondly imagine will attend maturer age ; at which, if we arrive, the brilliant prospect vanishes in disappointment, and we meet with nothing more than

than a dull inactivity or turbulent contentions.

The properties of the various seasons of the year, the gaiety of spring, the vigour of summer, the serenity of autumn, and the gloom of winter, have been so often assimilated to the corresponding periods of human life; the dangers and disquietudes of grandeur so often compared to the tempestuous situation of lofty mountains; and the quiet safety of inferior stations, to the calm security of the humbler vale, that a repetition of them here would be impertinent and useless; yet they all contribute to point out that analogy which uniformly pervades every part of the creation with which we are acquainted.

Between

Between the material and political world, this analogy is still more conspicuous: in the former, every particle of matter, of which the vast machine is composed, is actuated by that wonderful principle of attraction, which restrains, impels, and directs its progress to the destined end; in the latter, every individual of which the great political body is formed, is actuated by self-interest, a principle exactly similar, which, by a constant endeavour to draw all things to itself, restrains, impels, and directs his passions, designs, and actions to the important ends of government and society. As the first operates with force in proportion to the contents of the body in which it resides, so does the latter;

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in individuals it is small, in societies greater, and in populous and extensive empires most powerful. As the one acts with power in proportion to its distance, so does the other ; for we constantly find, that a small benefit bestowed on men as individuals, will influence them much more than a larger, which they may receive from national prosperity ; and a trifling loss, which immediately affects themselves, is more regretted, than one more considerable, which they feel only thro' the medium of public calamities. In another aspect, also, they greatly resemble each other ; they are both productive of many mischiefs, yet both necessary to the well-being and preservation of the whole. It

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is attraction that plunges us in the ocean; dashes us against the rocks; tumbles us from the precipice; and pulls down the tottering fabric on our heads: but it is this, also, that constitutes all body, that binds together the terrestrial globe, guides the revolving planets in their courses, and without it not only the whole material system would be dissolved, but I am inclined to think, that matter itself must be annihilated; for, matter being infinitely divisible, without this property, it must be infinitely divided; and infinite division seems to be nothing less than annihilation: for without attraction there could be no cohesion, without cohesion no solidity, and without solidity no matter.

matter. In like manner, self-interest, or what we mistake for it, is the source of all our crimes, and most of our sufferings. It is this, that seduces the profligate, by the prospect of pleasure; tempts the villain, by the hopes of gain; and bribes the hero with the voice of fame: but it is this also that is the source of all our connections, civil, religious, political, and commercial; that binds us together in families, in cities, and in nations, and directs our united labours to the public benefit: and without its influence, arts and learning, trade and manufactures, would be at an end, and all government, like matter by infinite division, would be annihilated.

The natural world subsists by a perpetual contention of the elements of which it is composed, the political by as constant a contest of its internal parties, struggling for superiority. In the former, the great system is carried on by a continual rotation of good and evil, alternately producing, and succeeding each other: continued sunshine produces tempests; these discharge themselves in refreshing rains; rains cause inundations, which, after some ravages, subsiding, assist commerce and agriculture, by scouring out the beds of rivers, and fertilizing lands; and sunshine returns again: so in the latter, long peace, the political sunshine, generates corruption, luxury, and faction, the parents of destructive

destructive wars ; war for a time awakens national vigour, and pours down wealth and plunder, then causes inundations of poverty and distress ; distress calls forth industry, agriculture, and commerce, and peace returns once more.

As night and day, winter and summer, are alternately circulated over the various regions of the globe ; so are poverty and wealth, idleness and industry, ignorance and science, despotism and liberty, by an uniform process arising from their own natural constitutions, and their invariable effects upon each other. In poor countries, necessity incites industry, and cheapness of provisions invites traders and manufacturers to reside ; this soon introduces

introduces wealth, learning, and liberty; and these are as soon followed by profusion, faction, and licentiousness; commerce will keep no such company, but, like a bird of passage, migrates to climes by poverty and cheapness better adapted to her constitution: these, in their turns, grow rich, civilized, free, dissolute, and licentious in the same manner, and are successively deserted for the same reason, and the same circle is again renewed.

In the material world, the constant circulation of the air, and flux and reflux of the tides, preserve those elements from a putrid stagnation; so in the political, controversies, civil and religious, keep up the spirits of national communities,

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and prevent them from sinking into a state of indolence and ignorance: but if either exceed the bounds of moderation, their consequences are extremely fatal; the former producing storms and inundations, and the latter anarchy and confusion. Lord Bacon observes, that war is to states, what exercise is to individuals; and in this they are extremely similar; a proper proportion may contribute to health and vigour, but too much emaciates, and wears out a constitution.

Thus, by a wise and wonderful disposition of things material and intellectual, God has infused into them all powers and propensities greatly analogous, by which they are enabled and compelled, in a similar

similar manner, to perform their respective parts in the general system, to restrain their own excesses, and to call back each other, whenever they too far deviate from their destined ends: and has said unto every thing, as well as to the ocean, to night and day, to winter and summer, to heat and cold, to rain and sunshine, to happiness and misery, to science and ignorance, to war and peace, to liberty and despotism, "Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther." These amazing instances of infinite wisdom in the œconomy of things, presenting every where an analogy so remarkable, are well worthy of our highest admiration; yet have been but little observed, because these divine dispositions ap-

pear to us to be no more than the necessary consequences of previous causes, and the invariable operations of nature, and we forget that nature is nothing more than the art of her omnipotent author.

DISQUISITION VI.

ON RATIONAL CHRISTIANITY.

TO several learned and ingenious writers, some doctrines of the Christian religion have appeared so contradictory to all the principles of reason and equity, that they cannot assent to them, nor believe that they can be derived from the Fountain of all truth and justice. In order therefore to satisfy themselves and others, who may labour under the same difficulties, they have undertaken the arduous task of reconciling revelation and reason; and great would have

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been their merits, had they begun at the right end, that is, had they endeavoured to exalt the human understanding to the comprehension of the sublime doctrines of the gospel, rather than to reduce those doctrines to the low standard of human reason; but, unfortunately for themselves and many others, they have made choice of the latter method, and, as the shortest way to effect it, have with inconsiderate rashness expunged from the New Testament every divine declaration, which agrees not exactly with their own notions of truth and rectitude; and this they have attempted by no other means, than by absurd explanations, or by bold assertions that they are not there, in direct contradiction

contradiction to the sense of language, and the whole tenour of those writings ; as some philosophers have ventured, in opposition to all men's senses, and even to their own, to deny the existence of matter, for no other reason, but because they find in it properties which they are unable to account for. Thus they have reduced Christianity to a mere system of ethics, and retain no part of it but the moral, which in fact is no characteristic part of it at all, as this, though in a manner less perfect, makes a part of every religion which ever appeared in the world. This ingenious method of converting Christianity into Deism, cannot fail of acquiring many respectable proselytes ; for every vir-

tuous and pious man, who would be a Christian if he could, that is, who reverences the name of Christianity, but cannot assent to it's tenets, is glad to lift under the standard of any leader, who can teach him to be a Christian, without believing any one principle of that institution.

Whoever will look back into the theological annals of this country, will find, that during the last century, the fashionable philosophers were for the most part Atheists, who ascribed every thing to chance, fate, or necessity; exclusive of all intelligence or design: these mighty Giants, who fought against Heaven, being at length overthrown by the absurdity of their own principles,
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and the superior abilities of their adversaries, retreated, about the beginning of the present, to the more tenable fort of Deism ; but here again, being frequently worsted, they at last took shelter under the covert-way of rational Christianity, where they now make their stand, and attack revelation with less odium, and more success, than from the open plains of professed Deism, because many are ready to reject the whole substance of the Christian institution, who would be shocked at the thought of relinquishing the name.

If Christianity is to be learned out of the New Testament, and words have any meaning affixed to them, the fundamental principles
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of it are these,—That mankind come into this world in a depraved and fallen condition ; — that they are placed here for a while, to give them an opportunity to work out their salvation, that is, by a virtuous and pious life to purge off this guilt and depravity, and recover their lost state of happiness and innocence, in a future life ; — that this they are unable to perform, without the grace and assistance of God ; — and that after their best endeavours, they cannot hope for pardon from their own merits, but only from the merits of Christ, and the atonement made for their transgressions by his sufferings and death. This is clearly the sum and substance of the Christian dispensation ; and so adverse

adverse is it to all the principles of human reason, that, if brought before her tribunal, it must inevitably be condemned by so incompetent a judge. If we give no credit to its divine authority, any attempt to reconcile them is useless; and, if we believe it, presumptuous in the highest degree. To prove the reasonableness of a revelation, is in fact to destroy it; because a revelation implies information of something which reason cannot discover, and therefore must be different from its deductions, or it would be no revelation. If God had told us, that we come into this world in a state of perfect innocence, void of all propensities to evil; that our depravity proceeds entirely from the abuse of that free-will,

will, with which he has been pleased to endue us ; that, if in this life we pursue a virtuous conduct, we have a right to be rewarded, and if a vicious, we may expect to be punished in another, except we prevent it by repentance and reformation, and that these are always in our own power—if God had informed us of nothing more, this would have been no revelation, because it is just what our reason, properly employed, might have taught us : but if he has thought proper, by supernatural means, to assure us, that our situation, our relations, our depravity, our merits, and our powers, are all of a kind extremely different from what we imagine ; and that his dispensations towards us

as are founded on principles which cannot be explained to us, because, in our present state, we are unable to comprehend them; this is a revelation, which we may believe, or not, according to our opinion of its authority; but let us not reason it into no revelation at all.

The writers of the New Testament frequently declare, that the religion which they teach, is a mystery, that is, a revelation of the dispensations of God to mankind, which without supernatural information we never could have discovered; thus St. Paul says, "Having made known to us the mystery of his will." What then is this mystery? not the moral precepts

cepts of the gospel; for they are no more a mystery than the Ethics of Aristotle, or the Offices of Cicero: the mystery consists alone in these very doctrines, which the Rationalist explodes, because they disagree with the conclusions of his reason; that is, because they are mysteries, as they are avowed to be by those who taught them.

But these bold advocates for reason, understand not its extent, its powers, or the proper application of them. The utmost perfection of human reason, is the knowledge of it's own defects, and the limits of its own confined powers, which are extremely narrow. It is a lamp which serves us very well for the common occupations of life, which are

are near at hand, but can shew us no prospect at a distance: on all speculative subjects, it is exceedingly fallacious, but in none so frequently misleads us, as in our religious and political inquiries; because, in the former, we draw conclusions without premises; and in the latter, upon false ones. Thus, for instance, reason tells us, that a Creator, infinitely powerful and good, could never permit any evil, natural or moral, to have a place in his works; because his goodness must induce him, and his power enable him, to exclude them: this argument is unanswerable by any thing, but experience, which every hour confutes it. Thus again, reason assures us, that sufferings, though they may

may be just punishments for past crimes, and a means to prevent them for the future, can never be compensations for them; much less can the sufferings of one Being atone for the guilt of another: against this no objection can be urged, except the belief of mankind, in all ages and nations, and the express declarations of revelation; which unanimously contradict it, and afford sufficient grounds for our concurrence. In these two instances we are deceived by misapplying our reason to subjects in which we have no premises to reason upon; for, being totally ignorant on what plan the universal system is formed and supported, we can be no judges of what is

good or evil with regard to the whole; and, as we know not for what ends either guilt or sufferings were ever admitted, we must be unable to comprehend what connections between them may possibly be derived from those ends. In our political discussions, reason equally misleads us; in these, she presents us with schemes of government, in which, by the most admirable contrivances, justice is so impartially administered, property so well guarded, and liberty so effectually secured, that in theory it seems impossible, that any people under such wise regulations can possibly fail of being happy, virtuous, and free; but experiment soon convinces us, that they are inade-

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quate to these salutary purposes, and that, in practice, they are productive only of anarchy and confusion. Here our errors arise from reasoning on false premises, that is, from supposing that mankind will act on principles incompatible with the vices, the follies, and the passions of human nature. If reason, therefore, is so fallible a judge in the little and low concerns of human policy, with which she is daily conversant, how absurd is the Rationalist, who constitutes her sole arbiter in the discussions of the most sublime subjects, of which she has not the least comprehension, the attributes and dispensations of the Almighty, our relations to him, and

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our connections with past and future states of existence !

Of all men, who are called Christians, the Rationalist seems to have the least pretence to that denomination : the Church of England acknowledges the belief of all the doctrines of this institution in her Articles, though in them they are ill explained, and worse expressed ; the Church of Rome assents to them all, but adds many without sufficient authority ; the Calvinist denies them not, but disgraces them by harsh, obscure, and absurd comments ; the Quaker admits them, but is bewildered by enthusiastic notions of partial inspirations ; and the Methodist subscribes to them all with the utmost veneration, but

(inconsistently) depreciates the merits of moral duties, at the same time that he insists on the practice of the most rigid ; but the Rationalist reprobates the whole, as impious, ridiculous, and contradictory to the justice of God, and the reason of man. Nor is he less adverse to the spirit, than to the letter of this religion : the true Christian is humble, teachable, and diffident ; the Rationalist is assuming, obstinate, and self-sufficient : the Christian hopeth all things, feareth all things, and believeth all things ; the Rationalist hopeth for nothing, but from his own merits, feareth nothing from his own depravity, and believeth nothing, the grounds of which he cannot perfectly understand.

ftand. Why then must he be a Christian? no man is now compelled to come in, nor more obliged to be a Christian, than a Free-Mason; the belief of it is not necessary to his advancement in life, nor his progress in any profession; we know, that he may be a lawyer, a physician, or even a divine, without it. If, on an impartial enquiry, he is a religious and moral Deist, why not own it? Such were Socrates, Plato, and Cicero and it is still a character by no means disgraceful to a virtuous man. I blame no one for want of faith, but for want of sincerity; not for being no Christian, but for pretending to be one, without believing. The professed Deist gives

Christianity fair play ; if she cannot defend herself, let her fall ; but the rational Christian assassinates her in the dark : the first attacks Christ, as did the multitude, with swords and staves ; the latter, like Judas, betrays him with a kiss.

DISQUI-

To B. P. Watson's reply to this.

DISQUISITION VII.

ON GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL LIBERTY.

IF any one casts his eye on the title of this essay, short as it is, he will scarcely be persuaded to read any farther; as he will rationally conclude, that on a subject so hackneyed by the best and worst writers of all ages, from Aristotle to the news-paper politicians of the present times, nothing can be added, which can afford either instruction or entertainment: but so many absurd principles, concerning government and liberty, have of late been disseminated with unusual

industry ; principles as false as mischievous, as inconsistent with common sense as with all human society ; that it seems necessary that they should not pass quite unnoticed, especially as they require nothing more, than to be fairly stated, to be refuted. The most considerable of them are the following ; to each of which I shall say a few words.

1st. That all men are born equal.

2dly. That all men are born free.

3dly. That all government is derived from the people.

4thly. That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed.

5thly. That no government ought to last any longer, than it continues

tinues to be of equal advantage to the two contracting parties, that is, to the governed, as to the governors.

First then ; That all men are born equal ; by which proposition, if it is only meant, that all men are equally born, that is, that one man is as much born as another, I shall not dispute its truth : but in every other sense it is intirely false ; for we daily see that some are born with beautiful and healthy bodies, and some with frames distorted, and filled with the most deplorable diseases ; some with minds fraught with the seeds of wisdom and genius, others with those of idiotism and madness ; some, by the laws and constitutions of their countries, are born

born to the inheritance of affluent fortunes and distinguished honours, others, to a life of poverty, labour, and obscurity. How these can be said to be born equal, I cannot comprehend. If by this proposition is to be understood, that, at the time of their birth, all men are possessed of an equal share of power, wealth, wisdom, learning, and virtue; when they are equally incapable of possessing any; this would be no less ridiculous, than to assert, that all men are born with teeth of the same length, when none of them are born with any teeth at all. But, supposing they were all born equal; would this prove, what is always intended to be proved by it, that they ought always to continue so?

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or can any argument be drawn from thence, against their future inequality, and subordination ? must no man presume to be six feet high, because perhaps he was born of the same size as another, who is now but four ? must no man assume power over another, because they were born equal, that is, because at their birth they were both incapable of exercising any power whatever ? Thus, we see, this mighty argument, drawn from the supposed natural equality of mankind, by which all powers and principalities are threatened to be overthrown, is intirely false, and if true, is nothing to the purpose for which it has been so often and so pompously introduced.

Secondly,

Secondly; That all men are born free. This is so far from being true, that the first infringement of this liberty is being born at all; which is imposed upon them, without their consent, given either by themselves or their representatives; and it may easily be shewn, that man, by the constitution of his nature, never subsists a free and independent Being, from the first to the last moment of his residence on this terrestrial globe: where, during the first nine months of his existence, he is confined in a dark and sultry prison, debarred from light and air; 'till at length, by an Habeas Corpus brought by the hand of some kind deliverer, he is set at liberty: but what kind of liberty does he then enjoy?

enjoy ? he is bound hand and foot, and fed upon bread and water, for as long a period ; no sooner is he unbound, than he makes so bad a use of his liberty, that it becomes necessary that he should be placed in a state of the severest discipline, first under a nurse, and then a schoolmaster, both equal tyrants in their several departments ; by whom he is again confined without law, condemned without a jury, and whipt without mercy. In this state of slavery he continues many years, and at the expiration of it, he is obliged to commence an involuntary subject of some civil government ; to whose authority he must submit, however ingeniously he may dispute her right, or be justly
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hanged for disobedience to her laws. And this is the sum total of human liberty. Perhaps it may be said, that all this may be ingenious ridicule, but cannot be intended for serious argument; to which I reply that it is the most serious argument that can be offered, because it is derived from the works, and the will of our Creator; and evidently shews, that man was never designed by him to be an independent and self-governed Being, but to be trained up in a state of subordination and government in the present life, to fit him for one more perfect in another: and, if it was not a reflection too serious, I should add, that, in the numerous catalogue of human vices, there is not one, which so compleatly disqualifies

disqualifies him from being a member of that celestial community, as a factious and turbulent disposition, and an impatience of controul; which frequently assumes the honourable title of the love of liberty.

Thirdly; That all government is derived from the people. This is another fallacious proposition; which in one sense is true, but, with regard to the principles so often established upon it, intirely false. It is true, indeed, that all government is so far derived from the people, that there could be no government if there were no people to be governed: if there were no subjects there could be no kings, nor parliaments if there were no constituents, nor shepherds if there were no sheep; but the inference

usually drawn from this proposition is utterly false, which is, that, because all government is derived from the people, the people have a right to resume it, and administer it themselves, whenever they please. But whatever claim they may have to this right, the exercise of it is impracticable, from the very nature of government; for all government must consist of the governors, and the governed; if the people at large are the governors, where shall we be able to find the governed? All government is power, with which some are intrusted, to controul the actions of others; but how is it possible that every man should have a power to controul the actions of every man? this would be a form of government,

government, which we have heard sometimes recommended as the most perfect, in which all are governed by all; that is, in other words, where there is no government at all. I agree with these pretended patriots, that the people in every country have a right to resist manifest grievances and oppressions, to change their governors, and even their constitutions, on great and extraordinary occasions; whenever they groan under the rod of tyranny, they have a right to shake it off, and form a constitution more productive of liberty; and, in like manner, if they find themselves torn by irreconcileable factions, and debilitated by internal contentions, they have an equal right to change

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it for a government more arbitrary and decisive. But we shall not agree so well in our definition of that important and misapplied term ‘the people;’ by which I would be understood to mean the whole body of a nation, advised and directed by the most respectable members of it; who are possessed of rank, property, wisdom, and experience: But who are those in this country, whom our modern demagogues distinguish by this name, and vest with this supreme dominion? Not the hereditary peers of the realm; not the representatives of this very people in parliament assembled; not the pastors of the church, the sages of the law, or the magistrates who are guardians of the public safety; not

not the possessors of landed property, the opulent stockholder, or the wealthy merchant. These are all represented as tools of ministers, lovers of slavery, united in a conspiracy to destroy their country and ruin themselves: they point out to us no defenders of our liberties or properties, but those who have themselves neither; no public-spirit, but in the garrets of Grub-street; no reformation, but from the purlieus of St. Giles's; nor one Solon, or Lycurgus, but who is to emerge from the tin-mines of Cornwall, or the coal-pits of Newcastle. These are not the people whom I should chuse to trust with unlimited power, because I know they are totally incapable of employing it to any sa-

latory purpose, even for themselves; and, whatever might be our grievances, redress from such hands would be much more intolerable.

Fourthly; That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed. This imaginary compact is represented by some, as a formal agreement entered into by the two contracting parties, by which the latter gives up part of their natural independence, in exchange for protection granted by the former; without which voluntary surrender, no one man, or body of men, could have a right to controul the actions of another; and some have gone so far as to assert, that this surrender cannot be made binding by representation, that

that parents cannot consent to it for their children, or nations for individuals, but that every one must give his personal concurrence, and that on this alone the constitution of every government is or ought to be founded: but all this is a ridiculous fiction, intended only to subvert all government, and let mankind loose to prey upon each other; for, in fact, no such compact ever was proposed or agreed to, no such natural independence ever possessed, and consequently can never have been given up. We hear a great deal about the constitutions of different states, by which are understood some particular modes of government, settled at some particular times, which ought

to be supported with religious veneration through all succeeding ages: in some of these, the people are supposed to have a right to greater degrees of liberty than in others, having made better bargains for themselves, and given up less of their natural independence: but this, and all conclusions drawn from these premises, must be false, because the facts on which they are founded are not true; for no such constitutions, established on general consent, are any where to be found; all which, we see, are the offsprings of force or fraud, of accident, and the circumstances of the times, and must perpetually change with those circumstances: in all of them, the people have an equal right to preserve

serve or regain their liberty, whenever they are able. But the question is not, what right they have to liberty—but, What degree of it they are capable of enjoying without accomplishing their own destruction. In some countries this is very small, and in none can it be very great, because the depravity of human nature will not permit it. Compact is repugnant to the very nature of government; whose essence is compulsion, and which originates always from necessity, and never from choice or compact; and it is the most egregious absurdity, to reason from the supposed rights of mankind in an imaginary state of nature, a state the most unnatural, because in such a state they never

did or can subsist, or were ever designed for. The natural state of man is by no means a state of solitude and independence, but of society and subordination; all the effects of human art are parts of his nature, because the power of producing them is bestowed upon him by the author of it. It is as natural for men to build cities, as for birds to build nests; and to live under some kind of government, as for bees and ants; without which he can no more subsist than those social and industrious insects; nor has he either more right, or power, than they, to refuse his submission. But if every man was possessed of this natural independence, and had a right to surrender it on a bargain,

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he must have an equal right to retain it; then he has a right to chuse, whether he will purchase protection at the price of freedom, or whether he prefers liberty and plunder to safety and constraint; a large majority of mankind, who have neither property nor principles, would undoubtedly make choice of the latter, and all these might rob, and murder, and commit all manner of crimes with impunity: for, if this their claim to natural independence is well founded, they could not be justly amenable to any tribunal upon earth, and thus the world would soon become a scene of universal rapine and bloodshed. This shews into what absurdities we run, whenever we

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reason from speculative principles, without attending to practicability and experience: for the real truth is no more than this, Every man, by the constitution of human nature, comes into the world under such a degree of authority and restraint as is necessary for the preservation and happiness of his species and himself; this is no more left to his choice, than whether he will come into the world, or not; and this obligation he carries about with him, so long as he continues in it. Hence he is bound to submit to the laws and constitution of every country in which he resides, and is justly punishable for disobedience to them. To ask a man whether he chuses to be subject to any law or government, is

is to ask him, whether he chuses to be a man, or a wild beast, and wishes to be treated accordingly. So far are men from being possessed of this natural independence, on which so many systems of anarchy have been erected, that submission to authority is essential to humanity, and a principal condition on which it is bestowed: man is evidently made for society, and society cannot subsist without government, and therefore government is as much a part of human nature, as a hand, a heart, or a head; all these are frequently applied to the worst of purposes, and so is government; but it would be ridiculous from thence to argue, that we should live longer and happier without them. The Supreme Governor of

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the world has not determined who shall be his vicegerents, nor what forms of government shall be adopted; but he has unalterably decreed that there shall be some; and therefore, though no particular governors can lay claim to a divine right of ruling, yet government itself is of divine institution, as much as eating, and for the same reason, because we cannot subsist without it.

Fifthly; That no government ought to subsist any longer, than it continues to be of equal advantage to the governed as to the governors. If this proposition is adopted; and by advantage wealth and power are to be understood, there is an end of all government

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at once ; for the greatest share of these must be possessed by the governors ; because without it they could not govern : power and property always accompany each other, and power is government ; these therefore must reside with those who govern ; and, how often soever these may change hands, and the condition of individuals be altered, with regard to the community, the case must eternally be the same : on this principle, therefore, the governed would have a perpetual right to resist, and every government ought to be dissolved at the moment of its commencement : on this principle, the lowest of the people, in every country, may at any time be incited to rebel, and their rebellion

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be justified; for, while they feel themselves oppressed with poverty, and condemned to labour, and behold their superiors enjoying all the pomps and luxuries of life, it will be easy to persuade them, that they receive greater benefits from government than themselves, and that, for that reason, they have a right to subvert it: this right they are always ready to assert, and will not so easily be dissuaded from the attempt, by being told, what is certainly true, that they really receive as much benefit from government as those who govern; because, by that alone, they are every day prevented from tearing one another to pieces: but this argument will have but little weight, because they will never

never be convinced, that this is any benefit, and not rather an infringement of their natural rights.

In short, all these wild and extravagant principles are the production of ignorance, or ambition, invented and propagated either by those who are unacquainted with human nature, and human government, or those who endeavour to render it impracticable in the hands of others, that it may fall into their own; and all terminate in one absurd conclusion, which is, That government is an unjustifiable imposition, and violation of the rights of nature, and ought to be eradicated from the face of the earth. But, happily for the world, whenever men presume to reason against

the course of nature, and the decrees of Providence, their arguments, however ingenious, have but little effect; for government there must be, so long as there are men, and the dispute will still continue to be, that only of who shall govern.

It is an old and a just observation, that the loudest advocates for liberty have always been the greatest tyrants whenever they have got power into their hands; and this must necessarily be; because a love of liberty is an impatience of controul, and, when this impatience of controul is united with power, resistance is an infringement of their liberty who possess it, and is treated by them with severity, in proportion

tion to their impatience of controul ; and thus the same disposition, which in a subject constitutes a patriot, in a prince creates a tyrant. This shews, that an extraordinary zeal for liberty is nothing more than an extraordinary fondness for power, that is, a power to controul the actions of others, uncontrouled ourselves ; and this love of liberty does not arise so much from our fears of being ill-governed, as from our dislike of being governed at all. So true is this, that I am fully persuaded, that if an angel was sent from heaven, vested with irresistible power, to govern any country upon earth, and was to execute his commission with the utmost degree of wisdom, justice, and bene-

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volence, his dominions would very soon be deserted by most of the inhabitants; who would rather chuse to suffer mutual injuries and oppressions, however grievous, under any government in which they themselves had a share, than to be compelled to be virtuous and happy by any superior authority whatever.

The usual fallacy of which democratic writers avail themselves, is this—they constantly charge all the numerous evils inherent in all human governments to the account of the governors; which for the most part are imputable with more propriety to the governed: it is owing to their vices that there is any such thing as government, or any occasion

occasion for it; and consequently all it's attendant evils must be derived from the same source. It is their crimes which require punishment, and their venality which makes corruption necessary; war, with all it's horrors, springs from their depravity, the violence of faction, the avarice of commerce, the ambition of the rich, and the profligacy and idleness of the poor: princes are made tyrants by the perverseness and disobedience of their subjects, and subjects become slaves from their incapacity to enjoy liberty. Every governor is in the situation of a gaoler, whose very office arises from the criminality of those over whom he presides; these sometimes suffer much from the abuse of his

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power ; but they would suffer more from their mutual ill-usage, if unrestrained by his superintendant authority. A vicious and corrupt people can never be free, because they are obliged to take shelter under despotism, which alone can defend them from the oppressions and injuries which they would every hour inflict upon each other ; and a virtuous people will never be slaves, because they stand in need of no such defence.

We cannot fall into a more common, or more pernicious error, than to imagine, that, because liberty is our supreme blessing, we, for that reason, can never have too much : if this was true, government would indeed be a grievance, and ought every

every where to be abolished; but the blessings of liberty, like all others bestowed upon mankind, are circumscribed within certain bounds, and become misfortunes by excess: dominion is not allotted to the few, for their own, but for the benefit of the many over whom they rule, and no greater degree of power should ever be trusted in the hands of man, than is requisite for that end; but to so much every community must submit for it's own preservation; and this is the only standard by which a just proportion of liberty can be ascertained. Every nation is by no means happy in proportion to the degree of freedom which it enjoys, but, as that degree is adapted to the cir-

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circumstances and the dispositions of the people; and with them must frequently change. The same degree of power, which happily governs a small, industrious, virtuous, and frugal state, is totally unable to restrain the avarice, ambition, and faction of an extensive, rich, and luxurious empire: as the still and crystal lake is quietly bounded by the flowery banks which surround it; whilst the turbulent and tempestuous ocean can be confined only by tremendous rocks and aspiring mountains. The greatest degree of liberty, which any people can enjoy, is, to be governed by equitable and impartial laws; but these cannot be administered, but either by their voluntary submission, or by

by superior force; if the first is refused, the latter must be exerted, and then liberty subsists no more: and hence it is evident, that those who will not be contented with the greatest degree of this invaluable blessing, must quickly find themselves deprived of the least; and that every people, who, from false and impracticable notions of liberty, refuse to submit to any government of their own, must very soon, from the constitution of human nature, be obliged to receive it under the yoke of some foreign power, which is wiser, and therefore stronger, than themselves.

DISQUISITION VIII.

ON RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS.

THE zealous advocates for religious liberty, frequently attack us with this triumphant question, What has government to do with men's religion? to which I answer, Nothing; provided men's religion had nothing to do with government: but our religious and political opinions and interests are so intimately connected, and so blended together, that it is impossible to divide them. Were religious controversies relative to speculative doctrines

doctrines only, government would have neither right or inclination to interfere in them; but such are by no means the objects of contention: these doctrines, believed by few, and understood by fewer, are nothing more than the signals of parties struggling for superiority, not for truth; for, as in civil contests men persecute each other for wearing ribands of different colours, so do they in religious, for professing different opinions; not that they have any objections to the ribands, or the opinions, but because both are the marks by which those are distinguished who are adverse to their pursuits. Protestants never institute severe penal laws against Papists because they believe transubstantiation,

tion, (for why should they not believe it, if they can?) but, because the profession of that doctrine is the test, by which those are known to be members of a church which would infringe their liberties, and devour a great part of their property ; on the other hand, the Church of Rome does not persecute Protestants because they cannot assent to this doctrine, but, because the disavowal of it is the signal that they are desirous to pull down that fabric of wealth and power, which they have erected for themselves, and are unwilling to part with : opinions are held forth as marks of distinction, but ambition and interest are the real causes of the dispute.

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It will perhaps be said, that notwithstanding this may be true, there are many, very many pious and honest persons, who, on the strictest examination, and clearest conviction, have adopted opinions on religious subjects, of which they are laudably tenacious, and cannot relinquish without violating both their reason and their conscience; and that of these, for which they are accountable to God alone, no government can have a right to take cognizance, much less to controul. To all this I readily agree, so long as they continue to be opinions only; but whenever they shoot up into actions, which is their natural proeess, they then come within the line of human jurisdiction,

tion, and government is obliged to take notice of them, not from choice, but from necessity, and self-preservation: for every religious sect holds principles more or less productive of arbitrary power, liberty, or anarchy, which must necessarily affect the civil constitutions under which they are professed; as they are the most dangerous, as well as the most common combustibles, which knavery employs to set folly and ignorance in a flame, whenever it may be subservient to her interest. All religious sects, however they may differ in other points, agree in one, which is the pursuit of power, and this by the same progressive steps—by first imploring toleration, next claiming equality, and

and then struggling for superiority over all the rest. Government cannot remain an unconcerned spectator of these contentions, in which her own existence is at stake, but must stretch out a pacific hand to compose them: this she can effect by no other method, than by taking one, which she most approves, under her protection, maintaining it's ministers, and forming her public worship agreeable to it's doctrines; that is, in other words, by an establishment: and thus we see, that some religious establishment must necessarily make a part of every national constitution; which necessity proceeds not from any natural connection between religion and government,
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but, because the artifice, ignorance, and superstition of mankind never fails to unite them: and hence, I apprehend, arises that alliance between church and state, which has been so much discussed, and so little understood.

The establishment of one religion ought always to be accompanied by an unlimited toleration of all others, on the principles of both justice and policy; of justice, because, although every government has a right to bestow her protection and emoluments on any mode of religion which she most approves, she can have no right to enforce the belief or exercise of that, or to prohibit the profession of any other, by compulsive penalties; of policy,

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because such a toleration is the most effectual means of putting an end to all religious dissensions—which springing, for the most part, from a love of singularity and contradiction, thrive under persecution, and, when they cease to be opposed, they cease to exist.

If some establishment is thus necessary, so must be some tests, or subscriptions, by which the friends of this establishment may be distinguished, and the principles of those who are admitted into it ascertained ; without which it would be no establishment at all : but every wise government will take care to make these as comprehensive as the nature of their institutions will admit, in order to lessen the number of her enemies ;

enemies ; for most assuredly such will all be who are excluded. Whoever are enemies to the religious constitution of any country, whatever they may pretend, can never be friends to it's civil ; for it is impossible that an honest man, who believes his own religious profession to be true, and most acceptable to his Creator, should ever be cordially attached to a constitution which discourages the exercise of it, and patronizes another, which appears to him to be false and impious. Extend this comprehension as widely as possible, it will exclude many pious and worthy persons, who are tenacious of different principles ; and narrow it to any degree, it will still admit all those who have

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none: nor is it inexpedient that they should be admitted; for every state has a right to avail itself of their assistance, who, though they are not so good men, may be better subjects; as these may be induced by interest to support the constitution of their country, while those are compelled by principle to subvert it.

Those who will not conform to any Christian establishment, give these reasons for their dissent;—that the religion so established is imperfect, corrupted, and dissimilar to the genuine purity of that holy institution; and that they are in duty bound to reject such a religion, and to search for another, which appears to them to be more perfect

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and pure. The first of these reasons is unhappily true, but no apology for their conduct; the latter, intirely a mistake, and therefore ought not to be regarded.

First then, the charge of imperfection and corruption may be made good against any established religion that ever existed. It must be liable to many imperfections from it's own nature, and the nature of man; in it's original institution, it must lean to the errors and prejudices of the times; and, how much soever it is then approved, it cannot long preserve that approbation, because, human science being continually fluctuating, mankind grow more or less knowing in every generation, and consequently must change

change their opinions on religious, as well as on all other subjects; so that, however wisely any established system may be formed at first, it must, from the natural increase or decrease of human knowledge, be found or thought to be erroneous in the course of a few years: and yet the change of national religions cannot keep pace with the alterations of national opinions, because such frequent reviews and reformations would totally unhinge men's principles, and subvert the foundations of all religion and morality whatever. It must likewise be corrupted by the very establishment which protects it, because by that it will be mixed with the worldly pursuits of its degenerate votaries; and it

must be extremely dissimilar to it's original purity, or it would be incapable of being established ; for pure and genuine Christianity never was, nor ever can be the national religion of any country upon earth. It is a gold too refined to be worked up with any human institution, without a large portion of alloy ; for, no sooner is this small grain of mustard-seed watered with the fertile showers of civil emoluments, than it grows up into a large and spreading tree, under the shelter of whose branches the birds of prey and plunder will not fail to make for themselves comfortable habitations, and thence deface it's beauty, and destroy it's fruits.

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These imputations on religious establishments are certainly just, but no reasons for dissensions, because the inference which makes the latter proposition is intirely a mistake; for no man can be bound in duty to desert a national religion on account of defects congenial to it's nature, nor to search for perfection, which is nowhere to be found. Some religious establishment is absolutely necessary to the existence of every state; but it is not necessary that this should be perfect, and free from all errors and corruption, nor even that it should be so esteemed by those who conform to it: it is sufficiently perfect for this purpose, if it contains nothing repugnant to the principles of

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sound morality, and the doctrines of Christ. The mass of the people in every country, being incapable of making any accurate inquiry into religious subjects, must have a religion ready made, or none at all; and in this, those of superior abilities may conscientiously join, without impeding their further researches into the dispensations of Providence and the duties of man. Great and numerous must be the inconveniences of any religious establishment in the hands of men; but what would be the condition of any nation in which there was none? No uniform mode of public worship could there be adopted; no edifices built or repaired for the celebration of it, nor ministers maintained to perform

perform it, except at the will of an ignorant and discordant multitude, the majority of whom would chuse rather to have neither worship, churches, or ministers, than to incur the expences which must attend them. Every man who had any sense of religion, would make one for himself ; from whence innumerable sects would spring up, each of which would chuse a minister for themselves ; who, being dependent for subsistence on the voluntary and precarious liberality of his congregation, must indulge their humours, submit to their passions, participate of their vices, and learn of them what doctrines they would chuse to be taught ; and consequently none but the most ignorant and

M 4 illiterate

illiterate would undertake so mean and beggarly an employment. A people thus left to the dominion of their own imaginations and passions, and the instructions of such teachers, would split into as many sects and parties, divisions and subdivisions, as knavery and folly, artifice, absurdity, and enthusiasm, can produce; each of which would be attacked with violence, and supported with obstinacy by all the rest. This evidently demonstrates, that some religious establishment must be annexed to every civil government; the members of which are so far from being bound in duty to desert it, because it falls short of their ideas of purity and perfection, that they are obliged by all the ties of benevolence

benevolence and society to conform to and support it, unless it requires any concessions positively criminal.

Should it still be insisted on, that every man is obliged to profess and exercise that religion which appears to him most consonant to reason, and most acceptable to God, with which no government can have a right to meddle, or power to controul ; in answer I shall only say, that all this is undoubtedly a mistake, which arises from applying propositions to men, as members of national communities, which are applicable to them only as individuals. Mankind, so long as they reside on this terrestrial globe, ought always to be considered in a two-fold capacity ; as individuals, and

and as members of society ; that is, as men, and as citizens : in which different situations, so different are their relations and duties, that there is scarce a proposition which we can affirm of them with truth in one, which is not false if applied to them in the other. It is by this misapplication that the zealous advocates for unbounded liberty, civil and religious, deceive their followers, and sometimes themselves, and draw conclusions equally destructive of all government and religion. Thus, for instance, they assert that all men are by nature free, equal, and independent : this, when applied to men as a general species, is true ; they then apply this assertion to men who are members of civil communities,

communities, to whom subordination is necessary, and obedience to their superiors an indispensable duty, and therefore in regard to whom it is absolutely false ; and yet from hence they endeavour to prove, that government is an infringement of the natural rights of mankind. In like manner they affirm, that every man is obliged to make choice of that religion, and to adhere to that mode of worship, which appear to his judgment to be the purest, and most acceptable to his Creator : this proposition, likewise, with regard to men considered as individuals, is true ; but this again they apply to members of national communities, and established churches : with regard to whom it is not true ; for, as such,

such, they are bound in duty to profess that religion, and practise that mode of worship, which the laws of that community enjoin, provided they find nothing in them positively evil : yet from hence they would persuade us, that every individual has a right to desert, or even to oppose the established religion of his country, whenever he finds, or fancies he can find a better. Thus are their unwary admirers deceived : the truth of these propositions they cannot deny, and have not perhaps sagacity sufficient to discover their misapplication.

It is remarkable, that Christianity constantly addresses us as men, never as citizens ; the only duty it requires of us under that character, is submission

mission to power in general, but prescribes no rules for our political conduct: all those divine precepts of patience, meekness, long-suffering, non-resistance of evil, contempt of the world, and indifference to the things of it, are given us as individuals, but not as members of national communities; because in that character they would have been impracticable: for no state can administer her internal policy, and much less regulate her conduct with regard to foreign powers, in conformity to these commands; because the imperfections, the passions, and the vices of mankind will not permit it. Any one as an individual may pay obedience to them; to those who have little to do with the

the busy occupations of the world, it is an easy and a pleasing task; for those who are deeply and earnestly engaged in the most innocent of them, it is extremely difficult; but for those who are employed in the great concerns of political communities, in carrying on war, negotiating peace, and managing the intrigues of contending factions, it is absolutely impracticable. This I take to be the cause of those frequent declarations from the Author of this religion, that neither himself nor his doctrines are of this world; but adverse to all it's pursuits: and this perhaps may be the reason of that assertion, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into

into the kingdom of God ; because, rich men being usually most engaged in these pursuits, most attached to the world, and most involved in the business of it, the extreme difficulty of their admission is thus forcibly expressed : or, if by a rich man, is here meant a great man, that is, a conqueror, a hero, or a statesman, this declaration may perhaps be literally true ; and that it should in this place be so understood, seems no improbable conjecture, as a rich man, and a great man, in most languages are synonymous terms. The first Christians saw their religion in this light, and refused to have any concern with government, unless to obey it ; they inquired not into the rights of those who ruled, nor their

own to liberty, and wished for nothing, but to pass thro' this life unincumbered with it's business, and well prepared for a better: so long as they were a small sect, dissenting from the religions of the countries in which they lived, this inoffensive conduct was easily preserved; but, when princes and nobles adopted their religion, and by such illustrious examples it became almost universal, these principles of inactivity were no longer tenable, without the total dissolution of all government; for, if no man would govern, there could be none: necessity therefore obliged them to take a part; a part soon awakened ambition, and love of power, those passions so natural to the human heart, and induced them to

to seize the whole ; Christianity was established, in consequence corrupted, and little more of it remained, except the name.

To this opinion of the incompatibility of Christianity with the occupations and customs of the world, were all those numerous monastic institutions, which every where accompanied it's progress, indebted for their origin ; institutions certainly favourable to the genuine spirit of that religion, but, like the religion itself, so adverse to the nature of man, that they can never be made fit for general use : could they have been confined to those few, who are capable of employing solitude in devotion and religious contemplation, they would undoubtedly have

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been conducive to the practice of every Christian virtue ; but, as all were indiscriminately admitted, who pretended to sanctity, or who mistook enthusiasm for piety, and a quarrel with the world for the love of God, they could not fail very soon to become nothing better than retreats for laziness, and seminaries of superstition and vice : yet, notwithstanding all their abuses, I am inclined to think there are still within their walls some few instances of patience and resignation, devotion and charity, carried to a higher degree of perfection than they are or can be in any other situation, in which the fashions, the pleasures, and business of life, and the corruptions of national establishments,

blishments, must more or less obstruct their progress; where our virtue must be endangered by continual temptations; our meditations diverted from celestial objects by worldly pursuits; our devotions interrupted by amusements and impertinence; and that serene clearfulness and happy complacency, so essential to the Christian profession, must frequently be disturbed by injuries and disappointments. The voluntary hardships which many of these recluses imposed upon themselves, were probably derived from a mistaken notion, that suffering was an essential part of their religion; a notion which they had perhaps contracted from that constant connection between them,

which they had so long observed and felt during their persecutions, and were not able suddenly to abandon, in happier and more indulgent times.

But why then establish a religion, which is so improper for the purpose? Because it is less improper than any other. The establishment of some religion is necessary to the existence of every state, and it is as necessary that this should be, or be thought, a revelation from God. Mere Deism never was, or can be, the established religion of any country; for, as all it's principles must be derived from the reason of some, they will always be controverted by the reason of others, and can therefore never

never obtain a general acquiescence. The philosopher, by learned investigations, and the force of his own understanding, may be convinced of the great truths of natural religion; but, without the sanction of supernatural authority, he will never be able to convince others, who will neither believe his doctrines, or obey his precepts. If Christianity, therefore, is not adopted, some fabulous system must supply it's place; and, if some established religion there must be, it is surely more eligible to make a true than a fictitious revelation the basis of it. Nor will any one, I suppose, assert, that it would be preferable to establish Paganism or Mahometism, and lay Christianity by for private

use; which, disfigured as it is by worldly connections, is still superior to all other institutions. As members therefore of political communities, we are bound to accept it with all it's imperfections; tho', as individuals, we ought always to approach as near to it's original purity, as our own imperfections will permit.

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